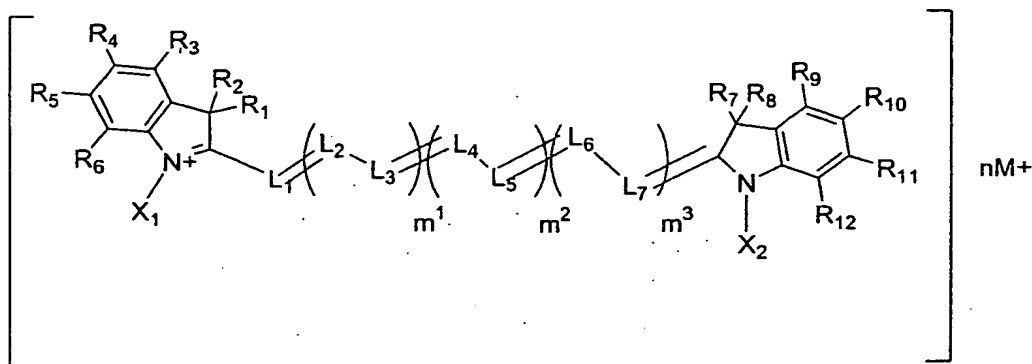


What is claimed is:

1. A near infrared fluorescent contrast agent comprising a compound represented by the following formula [I] or a pharmaceutically acceptable salt thereof:

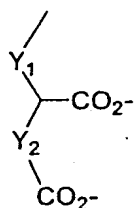


wherein R<sup>1</sup>, R<sup>2</sup>, R<sup>7</sup>, and R<sup>8</sup> independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted C<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>10</sub> alkyl group or a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group, and R<sup>1</sup> and R<sup>2</sup> and/or R<sup>7</sup> and R<sup>8</sup> may bind to each other to form a ring; R<sup>3</sup>, R<sup>4</sup>, R<sup>5</sup>, R<sup>6</sup>, R<sup>9</sup>, R<sup>10</sup>, R<sup>11</sup>, and R<sup>12</sup> independently represent a hydrogen atom, a substituted or unsubstituted C<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>6</sub> alkyl group, a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group, a substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl group, a halogen atom, cyano group, carboxyl group, or sulfo group, and R<sup>3</sup>, R<sup>4</sup>, R<sup>5</sup>, R<sup>6</sup>, R<sup>9</sup>, R<sup>10</sup>, R<sup>11</sup>, and R<sup>12</sup> may bind to each other to form a ring; X<sup>1</sup> and X<sup>2</sup> independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted C<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>15</sub> alkyl group or a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group and X<sup>1</sup> and X<sup>2</sup> in total have 0 to 4 carboxyl groups, provided that when the number of the carboxyl group is 0 or 1, each of X<sup>1</sup> and X<sup>2</sup> is a C<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>5</sub> carboxyalkyl group or a sulfoalkyl group and at least one of R<sup>3</sup>, R<sup>4</sup>, R<sup>5</sup>, R<sup>6</sup>, R<sup>9</sup>, R<sup>10</sup>, R<sup>11</sup>, and R<sup>12</sup> represents a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group or a substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl group; m<sup>1</sup> represents 0 or 1; m<sup>2</sup> represents 0 or 1; m<sup>3</sup> represents 0 or 1; L<sup>1</sup>, L<sup>2</sup>, L<sup>3</sup>, L<sup>4</sup>, L<sup>5</sup>, L<sup>6</sup>, and L<sup>7</sup> independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted methine group, provided that when two or more of the

methine groups have substituents, the substituent may bind to each other to form a ring, provided that when each of  $X^1$  and  $X^2$  has one carboxyl group, each of  $X^1$  and  $X^2$  is carboxyl group-substituted hydrocarbon group and at least one of the methine groups represented by  $L^1$ ,  $L^2$ ,  $L^3$ ,  $L^4$ ,  $L^5$ ,  $L^6$ , and  $L^7$  is a substituted methine group and  $R^4$  and  $R^{10}$  represent a sulfo group;  $M$  represents a hydrogen atom, a metal, or a quaternary ammonium salt; and  $n$  represents an integer of 1 to 7 necessary for neutralizing charge.

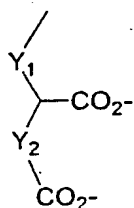
2. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1, wherein each of  $m^1$ ,  $m^2$ , and  $m^3$  is 1.

3. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1 or 2, wherein  $X^1$  is a group represented by the following formula (i):



wherein  $Y^1$  and  $Y^2$  independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted divalent linking group.

4. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1 or 2, wherein  $X^1$  and  $X^2$  independently represent a group represented by the following formula (i):

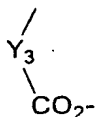


wherein Y<sup>1</sup> and Y<sup>2</sup> independently represent a substituted or unsubstituted a divalent bond.

5. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein at least one of R<sup>3</sup>, R<sup>4</sup>, R<sup>5</sup>, R<sup>6</sup>, R<sup>9</sup>, R<sup>10</sup>, R<sup>11</sup>, and R<sup>12</sup> is a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group or a substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl group.

6. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1 or 2, wherein at least one of R<sup>4</sup>, R<sup>5</sup>, R<sup>10</sup>, and R<sup>11</sup> is a substituted or unsubstituted aryl group or a substituted or unsubstituted heteroaryl group; and each of X<sup>1</sup> and X<sup>2</sup> is independently a C<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>5</sub> carboxyalkyl group or a sulfoalkyl group.

7. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to claim 1 or 2, wherein X<sup>1</sup> and X<sup>2</sup> independently represent a group represented by the following formula:



wherein Y<sup>3</sup> represents a C<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>10</sub> hydrocarbon group and at least one of the methine groups represented by L<sup>1</sup>, L<sup>2</sup>, L<sup>3</sup>, L<sup>4</sup>, L<sup>5</sup>, L<sup>6</sup>, and L<sup>7</sup> is a substituted methine group and each of R<sup>4</sup> and R<sup>10</sup> is a sulfo group.

8. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to any one of claims 3 or 4 wherein Y<sub>1</sub> represents -(CH<sub>2</sub>)<sub>p</sub>CONH- wherein p represents an integer of 1 to 4 and Y<sub>2</sub> represents -(CH<sub>2</sub>)<sub>1</sub>- or (CH<sub>2</sub>)<sub>2</sub>-.

9. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to any of claims 1 to 8, which is used for tumor imaging.

10. The near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to any of claims 1 to 8, which is used for angiography.

11. A method of fluorescence imaging which comprises the steps of introducing the near infrared fluorescent contrast agent according to any of claims 1 to 8 into a living body, exposing said body to an excitation light, and detecting near infrared fluorescence from the contrast agent.